

Claims:

1. A method for selecting the nature and/or form of an alert used to announce a call made by a user participating in a customised alert service, the method including:
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- a. establishing a customised alert service configuration for a participating user, the customised alert service configuration being stored on one or more network accessible devices;
  - b. the participating user using a first communications terminal to make a call to a second communications terminal, the call being supported by a first communications service;
  - c. identifying a chosen alert descriptor from the customised alert service configuration for the participating user;
  - d. the second communications terminal fetching the chosen alert descriptor from a location remote from the first communications terminal and the second communications terminal; and
  - e. the second communications terminal announcing the call by activating an alert using the chosen alert descriptor.
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- 20 2. A method for selecting the nature and/or form of an alert used to announce a call made by a user participating in a customised alert service, the method including:
- a. establishing a customised alert service configuration for a participating user which includes multiple alert descriptors, the customised alert service configuration being stored on one or more network accessible devices;
  - b. the participating user using a first communications terminal to make a call to a second communications terminal, the call being supported by a first communications service; and
  - c. the second communications terminal announcing the call by activating an alert using a chosen alert descriptor;
  - d. wherein the chosen alert descriptor is selected from the participating user's multiple alert descriptors according to the customised alert service configuration for the participating user. ;
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3. A method for selecting the nature and/or form of an alert used to announce a call made by a user participating in a customised alert service, the method including:

- 5 a. establishing a customised alert service configuration for a participating user, the customised alert service configuration being stored on one or more network accessible devices;
- b. the participating user using a first communications terminal to make a call to a second communications terminal, the call being  
10 supported by a first communications service; and
- c. the second communications terminal announcing the call by activating an alert using a chosen alert descriptor;

wherein the alert descriptor is chosen according to the customised alert service configuration for the participating user;  
15 and wherein recently used alert descriptors are cached at the second communications terminal or on a network accessible device ready for rapid re-use.

4. A method for selecting the nature and/or form of an alert used to  
20 announce a call made by a user participating in a customised alert service, the method including:

- a. providing a range of alert descriptors available for selection and use by participating users;
- b. establishing a customised alert service configuration for a  
25 participating user including one or more alert descriptors selected from the available range of alert descriptors, the customised alert service configuration being stored on one or more network accessible devices;
- c. the participating user using a first communications terminal to  
30 make a call to a second communications terminal, the call being supported by a first communications service; and
- d. the second communications terminal announcing the call by activating an alert using a chosen alert descriptor;

wherein the chosen alert descriptor is chosen according to the customised alert service configuration for the participating user.

5. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein the selecting and/or providing of at least one alert descriptor includes selecting an alert descriptor from a set of available alert descriptors.
6. A method according to claim 5 wherein the set of selectable alert descriptors is contained on a network accessible device.
7. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 4 wherein alert descriptor information is transmitted from one communications terminal to another during the course of a voice call between two or more terminals.
8. A method according to claim 7 wherein the transmission of alert descriptor information occurs:
  - a. during pauses in voice conversation; or
  - b. after voice conversation has ended; or
  - c. interleaved with voice conversation.
9. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 4 wherein the establishing of a customised alert service includes providing information which identifies the participating user or first communications terminal or first communications service.
10. A method according to claim 9 wherein the chosen alert descriptor is chosen according to processing of the identification information.
11. A method according to claim 10 wherein the processing is performed by the second communications terminal.
12. A method according to claim 10 wherein the processing is performed by a server device.

13. A method according to claim 9 wherein the establishing of a customised alert service configuration for a participating user includes selecting and/or providing ancillary information for the participating user.
- 5 14. A method according to claim 13 wherein the chosen alert descriptor is chosen according to processing of the ancillary information and the identification information.
- 10 15. A method according to claim 14 wherein the processing of the ancillary information includes processing variables associated with the ancillary information, the associated variables selected from:
  - a. temporal variables;
  - b. seasonal and cultural variables;
  - c. geographical variables;
  - 15 d. proximity variables; and
  - e. personal variables.
- 20 16. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 4 wherein the chosen alert descriptor is communicated to the second communications terminal from the first communications terminal.
- 25 17. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 4 wherein the chosen alert descriptor is communicated to the second communications terminal from a network accessible device.
- 30 18. A method according to claim 16 wherein the chosen alert descriptor is communicated using the first communication service.
19. A method according to claim 16 or claim 17 wherein the chosen alert descriptor is communicated using a communication path other than the first communication service.
- 35 20. A method according to claim 18 or claim 19 wherein the chosen alert descriptor has been communicated to the second communications terminal prior to a call set-up process.

21. A method according to claim 18 or claim 19 wherein the chosen alert d scriptor is communicated to the second communications terminal during a call set up process.
- 5 22. A method according to claim 18 or claim 19 wherein the chosen alert descriptor is communicated to the second communications terminal asynchronous to a call set up process.
- 10 23. A method according to claim 19 wherein the alternative communications path makes use of the Internet.
24. A method according to claim 1, 2 or 4 wherein the customised alert service operates within a network of a plurality of communications terminals and servers, wherein at least some of the communications terminals and servers participate in a caching scheme which allows alert descriptors to be sourced from a plurality of different servers or communications terminals within the network.
- 15 25. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 4 wherein users who receive calls are able to exercise control over the kinds of customised alerts that they are willing to receive.
- 20 26. A method according to claim 25 wherein alerts are categorised according to their nature and/or content, and users who receive calls may choose to receive only particular categories of alerts.
- 25 27. A method according to claim 25 wherein a user who receives calls may elect that a call be announced by a combination of two different alerts, one selected by the receiving user and one selected by a calling user.
- 30 28. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 4 wherein the call is any one of the group of a telephone call, a voice over internet protocol call, a

videophone call, a data call, a whiteboard sharing call, an instant messaging session, a multi-user gaming session.

- 5 29. A computerised system for enabling the nature and/or form of an alert used to announce a call made by a user participating in the system to a communications terminal participating in the system to be determined in accordance with the participating user's preferences, including:
- 10 a. a plurality of communications terminals, at least some of which are capable of receiving and acting on an alert descriptor(s) and calls associated with alert descriptor(s);
- b. a data entry device for creating a customised alert service for a participating user;
- 15 c. configuration software for configuring the participating user's customised alert service, the configuring of the participating user's customised alert service including selecting and/or providing at least one alert descriptor for use with the participating user's customised alert service;
- d. a database for storing the participating user's customised alert service configuration;
- 20 e. processing means for choosing an alert descriptor for use with the call made by the participating user to a receiving communications terminal; and
- f. Means of communicating alert descriptors to the receiving communications terminal;
- 25 wherein the chosen alert descriptor is selected in accordance with the configuration of the participating user's customised alert service.
- 30 30. A system according to claim 29 wherein the processing means is a communications terminal associated with the participating user.
31. A system according to claim 29 wherein the processing means is the receiving communications terminal.

32. A system according to claim 29 wherein the processing means is a server device.